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ABSTRACT

This profile of the English language teaching situation in Bangladesh discusses the role of English in the community and within the educational system. The amount of time devoted to English is discussed, as well as the syllabus used, the teaching staff, teacher training, and teaching materials. English instruction outside the educational system is described, as well as British and American support for the teaching of English. An appendix describes the status of literature instruction at all educational levels. (CLK)

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE

Country: BANGLADESH

March 1977

1. The Role of English

1.1 After the partition of India, language differences proved to be a deeply divisive factor in the new state of Pakistan which was established as a unified Moslem state made up of two large areas separated by the breadth of north India. Jinnah's policy, that Urdu should be the sole national language throughout Pakistan with English as the second language, led to protests, rioting and bloodshed in the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in favour of Bengali, the language of that area. It was one element in the discontent that led eventually to the War of Liberation (from Pakistan). And when the new state of Bangladesh was established, the mother tongue - historically called Bengali and currently known as Bangla - was seen quite naturally as an instrument of national identity and patriotism. The use of Bangla was encouraged. An early ordinance required all schools and institutions of higher education in Bangladesh to use it as the sole medium of instruction.

1.2 It is said that the standards of English were higher before the War of Liberation when English was a unifying and effective language of communication in government, business and education. Of the three languages then in current use (Urdu, Bangla and English), only English was common to all. But when Bangla was established as the sole national language, not only was Urdu discouraged: the teaching and use of English also suffered. No Government school now officially uses English as the medium of instruction (and only two international schools are licensed English-medium), all internal government minuting is in Bangla, and increasingly Bangla is the medium of instruction in the Universities. In consequence English is neither sufficiently widespread nor sufficiently well taught to be the second language of a genuinely bilingual nation. Yet it is not a wholly foreign language. It remains the prestige language of the educated minority, particularly in the capital area where there are, for example, two widely-read, English-medium newspapers. It might be described as ESL lapsing into EFL.

1.3 The exclusive emphasis of Bangla linguistic nationalism has probably passed its peak. Though this emphasis has never been regretted and is reiterated annually on Language Martyrs' Day, there is a growing realisation that a second working language must be maintained for administration (particularly in the international areas peopled by aid donors) and for advanced study. For both historical and pragmatic reasons, English is accepted as the natural choice for such a language. One indication of the increasing importance that is officially attached to a resurgence of ELT was the setting up in November 1975 by the Ministry of Education of an ELT 'Task Force'. Its purpose was to survey the state of English language teaching at Secondary, Higher Secondary and Teacher Training levels; to assess the personnel and teaching materials that were available; and to assess English language proficiency at these levels. This body has now made its report (in February '77) and official reactions to its recommendations are awaited.

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1.4 At least one of its recommendations was overtaken by another significant indicator of the revised attitude to English. There is a belief, founded on a statement that we have not been able to document, that the Chief Martial Law Administration favours the teaching of English, from Grade III, instead of from Grade VI where it is officially begun at present. Present planning is based on this belief. This recognition of English as a skill to be imparted by the Bangladesh educational system is gratifying, but its effect on the system is yet to be fully explored.

1.5 English is learnt in Bangladesh to satisfy three needs: viz, social, occupational and study needs. Since the first affects an insignificant number in the population, it need not be considered here. Occupational needs are few but important and include such essential occupations as scientists, engineers, diplomats, doctors, pilots, specialised administrative personnel etc, who need mastery of the kind of spoken or written English appropriate to their job. Again the numbers are small, and their need might best be met by specialised courses at University and post-University levels. The English language needs, therefore, that affect most keenly the student population of Bangladesh are study needs. The English language needs, therefore, that affect most keenly the student population of Bangladesh are study needs. The Medium of instruction at University level is theoretically Bangla. This means, in effect, that lecturing in some faculties is exclusively in Bangla; some (especially engineering and science) use English almost exclusively; and it seems that most use a mixture of both, the lecturer moving without warning from Bangla to English to Banglishi. The proportion of subjects taught in Bangla will undoubtedly grow. But most significant for the immediate future is the fact that most of the available basic text-books, and virtually all of the accessible research and supplementary materials in modern-sector subjects, are in English. Even the most intensive and concerted efforts in translation are not likely to change this in the near or middle-future. The significance of English as a library language is tacitly recognised by the permission given to students who may choose to write their examination papers in English.

2. English within the Educational system

English has always been a compulsory language in schools. Before Liberation, it was taught as third language, precedence being given to Urdu, the official state language. Since Liberation, English has been taught compulsorily in all Junior High Schools (grades VI-X), in all other institutions at this level (eg Vocational Training Institutes) and in all Intermediate Colleges (grades XI-XII), and to all streams within these institutions. In addition to this most primary schools do in fact teach English from grades III-V: this is not compulsory, except by local decision, but it seems likely that it will become so. (The National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee has recommended this and a decision is expected soon.) The study of the English language as such is not compulsory at tertiary level.

2.1 Average number of periods (= 35 minutes) per week allocated to the teaching of English:

		Government Schools	Non-Government Schools
Primary	Grade 1	-	-
	2	-	-
	3	5	
	4	5	
	5	5	

High Schools	Grade 6	7	8
	7	8	9
	8	7.5	9
	9	8	10
	10	8.5	9.5
Intermediate Colleges	11	6	6
	12	6	6

2.2 Within the schools system there is no distinction made between language and literature, except in the internal organisation of teaching at grades VIII-XII where all the work is directed towards the preparation for external public examinations. At the University level, however, it is significant that the English Departments are known locally as 'Departments of English Literature'. (See Appendix 1). At the present time, these departments make little provision for the teaching of English language - other than as the medium for English Literature - or linguistics. Steps are now being taken to introduce a language element to their courses. (See Appendix 2). Nevertheless, the present aims, methods and products of the University Departments of English have been characterised as 'wildly unrealistic and dangerously unrelated to the most urgent educational needs of the.....country. The preservation and expansion of a thoroughly derivative tradition of literary critical scholarship in English...seems to be the chief concern of most teachers including those willing both to recognise acute problems and to anticipate necessary solutions'. Though this is perhaps an exaggerated reaction, it reflects a genuine concern that the Departments of English in Bangladesh Universities are not really adopting a role in furthering English language as a tool for development.

2.3 In an educational system as conservative as that of Bangladesh, there can be no doubt about the all-pervasive, even baleful, effect of public examinations. This influence is perhaps compounded in the case of English because not only is English a compulsory subject at both the Secondary School Certificate (taken at the end of grade X) and the Higher School Certificate (grade XII): it is, together with Bangla at both levels and Religion at SSC, one of the subjects in which a pass is mandatory, and in which failure results in the withholding of the group certificate. Since the gaining of these certificates is necessary to progression in the system, and since the grade obtained at HSC is decisive in acceptance for study at the tertiary level, proficiency in English (insofar as it is judged by these examinations) is an essential element in educational advancement. Paradoxically, the importance vested in a pass in English as a barrier to certification probably results in a lowering of standards. (The stated pass mark is a lowly 33 per cent, but since marks from 28 to 33 per cent are avoided, the pass mark is effectively 28 per cent - and this after all gratis marks of grace and condonation have been added to the original score.) The syllabuses from grade IX to grade XII are no more than the examinations syllabuses and the areas of English study which are considered of paramount importance may be seen from a cursory glance at the marks distribution which is the same for both levels

40 answers to questions requiring detailed knowledge of set texts from an Anthology

30 writing tasks (letter, story and essay)

10 grammar and usage questions

10 reading comprehension

10 translation from Bangla to English

2.4 As has been stated, responsibility for the syllabuses of grades VIII to XII effectively rests with the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education, quasi-autonomous bodies who control the public examination syllabus. Syllabuse change at these levels (and there has been none in recent years) would normally be initiated by committees of the Boards, though final decisions would rest with the Ministry of Education. Syllabuses and curricula at all other levels in the schools system are the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Changes are normally initiated by the establishment of ad hoc committees who at irregular intervals are asked to recommend revisions. There is at present such a revision for all school subjects including English being undertaken. Since there is no provision for a subject inspectorate in any subject, there is no mechanism for on-going consideration and revision of English syllabuses. Nor is there any attempt at any level to supervise nationally the teaching of English.

2.5 Once syllabuses have been approved by the Ministry of Education, the responsibility for the production of books for use in grades I-VIII lies with the separately constituted Text-Book Board. The use of these text-books is obligatory in all schools: they are subsidised and no commercially produced text-books are available in any case. The anthologies for use at SSC and HSC are prescribed by the Boards: they are commercially produced and are often sold in a package with Bazaar notes of a very inferior kind. Other books which are used at the later stages (eg 'Functional Grammars') are produced by open competition among commercial publishers. Their standards are uniformly low.

2.6 There is nowhere within the system, either in the syllabuses or in the available text-books, any provision for the teaching of English for special purposes. Any ESP which may be done is local, arbitrary and uncoordinated. Similarly, there is nowhere any separate provision for the teaching of English to adults.

3. Teaching Cadre

3.1 Apart from the observable fact that classes at all levels of the system are far too large to be educationally viable, it has to be said that there are enough class minders to meet the quantitative demand for teachers of English. The teaching profession in Bangladesh and consequently the English teaching cadre is virtually one hundred per cent Bangladeshi.

3.2 Accurate figures - any figures - concerned with the training and qualifications of the existing teaching cadre are simply not available. In general, and this applies to all subjects, one can say that teaching in the Intermediate Colleges (grades XI and XII) is conducted by teachers with Masters' degrees (except for those with MEds, therefore, the teachers will have had no training, and in the Universities nothing whatsoever at present is done to equip Honours English BA and MA students to teach the language itself). Teachers in the High Schools have a variety of qualifications, though a BA is supposed to be a minimum qualification. A survey of the qualifications of teachers of English in 23 High Schools (8 Government High Schools, 8 Non-Government High Schools in Urban areas and 7 Non-Government High Schools in Rural areas) showed that 60 per cent had undergone full time

teacher-training (for MEds and BEds). Some of this training may have included ELT. We can only say 'may have included ELT' because the 1970 investigation of teachers by the Institute for Educational Research of Dacca University states that 74% of all High School teachers teach some English and goes on to state that of this number only one-fifth (ie 14 per cent of the total) had any training in English. There is no significant percentage of trained teachers of English in the primary schools, though the IER survey showed that 83 per cent of primary school teachers teach some English.

3.3 There are at present five kinds of teacher training establishments. Of these, two offer no training at all for ELT: the Primary Training Institutes (PTIs) and the Technical Teacher Training Institute. Prospective teachers may elect to specialise in English in the three year BA (Education) offered by the Colleges of Education, in the one year BEd course offered by the six Teachers Training Colleges, or in the MEd and PhD courses offered by the Institute of Education and Research at Dacca University. It is generally agreed that these teacher training courses are largely theoretical with little guidance given in professional skills. The only provision for in-service training for ELT is that provided by the Education Extension Research Institute in Dacca, which offers short courses of one to three weeks' duration.

3.4 There can be no doubt that the present provision for the training of English language teachers is inadequate. A measure of the problem may be gauged by looking at what will be required if English is made a compulsory subject in all primary schools where there are at present no trained teachers of English: by the smallest estimates, ie by aiming to provide one trained teacher of English in each primary school, over 40,000 teachers will have to be trained immediately. Yet the Primary Training Institutes have at present no teacher trainers with any qualifications or even significant experience in the teaching of English. 47 EL teacher trainers will be required to staff PTIs if and when English is introduced as a subject. The recruitment and training of this staff will itself present a problem. The extent of the problem in the schools can be estimated from the results of another recent small survey of teachers in training. This survey attempted to assess the trainee teachers' own proficiency in the language of the ELT textbooks used in schools. The table therefore is expressed in terms of the trainee teachers' own ability to handle the English language above the grade level indicated.

	IX	VIII	VII	VI	V
TTC (graduates)		20			
College of Education					26
High School teachers (In-service)	15	33		50	
Teachers in Intermediate Colleges (In-service)	30	100			
PTI students			0		21

(Only 1.8 per cent of PTI students showed any ability to write simple sentence structures.)

In other words a crude approximation indicates that at all levels in the school system, 80 per cent of the teachers of English are not themselves competent in the language skills they purport to teach.

3.5 There has not recently been any significant in-service training courses in ELT, other than those held at the Education Extension Research Institute.

3.6 There is no local professional organisation with specific interest in the teaching of English.

4. Teaching Materials

4.1 The responsibility for producing all text-books for Grades I-VIII of the schools system lies with the Text-Book Board, a semi-autonomous and subsidised Board set up by the Ministry of Education for this purpose. The basic text-books produced for ELT are the "New Model English Course, Books I-III" which are used for Grades III-V inclusive, and "Middle Stage English, Books I-III" which are used for grades VI-VIII. Both these sets of books are structurally graded, and some care has been taken to control the lexical content. Neither of them can any longer be considered satisfactory, the paper is of poor quality, the fount is fussy and the lay-out cramped and dull; many of the passages are too long; there is not enough guidance for the poorly qualified teacher; the early stages depend on a completely oral method which is inappropriate in classes containing 50 or more pupils, taught by teachers whose own English is often weak.

4.2 As was mentioned in para 2.3, the syllabuses for Grades IX-XII are nothing more than the marking scheme for the examinations of the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education and their past papers. Literature is introduced for the first time and the books used are those books of prose and verse extracts which are published by the Board (and often sold in the booksellers alongside ill-written and ill-assembled books of commentaries). There may have been a time when such books of extracts were acceptable professionally on the supposition that the task of English teaching was to encourage cultural development and skin-deep acquaintance with the great works of English literature. In a country which needs English for pragmatic purposes, their relevance is hard to see, and in any case their choice of extract is difficult to justify. At this stage the language preparation is catered for by use of past papers of the different Boards, and by the perusal of books of 'Functional English', which are commercially produced: the grammar and exercises are traditional in form and content, and the examples for imitation are often stylistically and idiomatically suspect.

4.3 Text-books, blackboards and chalk are the only aids to the teaching of English that are available to the hard-pressed teacher of English in Bangladesh. Of the four known language laboratories in the country, none are functioning. Few schools have tape-recorders, and fewer still ever use them (commercially produced tapes are not available, and schools have no money to acquire blanks). Some schools have radios, but there are no ELT programmes during school hours. Libraries are small and rarely used: of a number of schools investigated, Government School libraries showed that issues per week amounted to 36 per cent of the total role. Rural and Urban Non-Government Schools had a library issue of 4 per cent of their total role.

4.4 The ELT Task Force report stresses the need for the production of new text-books. No start has been made on this task for the moment because the Ministry of Education is awaiting the production and acceptance of the new curricula for all stages of the school system: it is hoped that

the National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee will have completed this work for all subjects, including English, by June 1977, and then the way may be clear to the writing of new text-books at all levels of the school system.

5. English outside the Educational System

There are a few small tutorial schools, often teaching English alongside typing and commercial subjects. They have no professional reputation whatsoever.

6. British Support for the teaching of English

6.1 No of Council ELT staff involved: 1
Position: ACE Adviser to the University Grants Commission.
Main ELT activities: advisory work, training and materials production for the Departments of English in the general Universities. (See Appendix 2)

6.2 No of British contract ELT staff recruited through the Council: none.

6.3 VSOs teaching English: one.
Position: lecturer, University of Rajshaji.
(A request for a similar post at the University of Chittagong is being investigated).

6.4 Other British staff teaching English: none.

6.5 Special activities recently supported by the Council:

i. Both Representative and EO were active members of the ELT Task Force.

ii. Both Representative and EO are active members of the ELT sub-committee of the NCSC.

iii. EO is a member of the sub-committee which has been working on the production of ELT syllabus for the PTIs.

iv. An educational seminar on the preparation of ELT materials was conducted in May-June 1976 by three British based lecturers supported by ACE and EO.

v. A main emphasis during the November 1976 Examinations workshops, which were conducted by two British lecturers, was on the examining of English.

6.6 There are no British ELT materials available in Bagladesh in significant quantities. The Council's own small film library and that of BIS are well used, but there is no teaching of English by TV or radio.

7. American Support for the Teaching of English

Until recently the USA have been inhibited politically from helping in the development of English. In March 1977 however, a team of 3 lecturers sponsored by USIS held a 3 day ELT seminar for teachers in degree Colleges (these teachers in fact teach English Literature, not English language). USIS but not, we believe, USAID are investigating possible areas in which they might contribute

to the development of English. Such help is not likely to be extensive. There has been continuous consultation between the Council and USIS on this matter.

8. General Statement

There are no strengths and many weaknesses in the present ELT situation. The general factors that have delayed effective action to promote ELT include emotion, politics, poverty and the low developmental priority given to ELT within Bangladesh. Particular factors, in no particular order of importance because none is paramount, include

- poorly paid, often untrained teachers who have themselves severe limitations in their command of English.
- outdated and unrealistic syllabuses.
- rote-encouraging examinations syllabuses.
- large classes.
- poor facilities, and a complete lack of supplementary/ancillary equipment.
- inadequate text-books.
- an archaic and unco-ordination system of educational administration.
- the gap between assumed and actual levels of proficiency, particularly at grade VI and necessarily thereafter.
- teacher-centred teaching methods that emphasise passive learning and non-participation, that encourage reading aloud as a purposeful activity and discourage the acquisition of comprehension and writing skills.
- the ambivalent attitude to ELT in primary system, for though English is not compulsory, it is nevertheless taught and taught badly: it is counter-productive, producing such harmful side effects as meaningless memorisation and reduction of interest, and achieving little more than a knowledge of the alphabet and a rudimentary ability to recognise words out of context.
- the complete absence of any native voice in the classrooms, even a voice distanced by tape or radio.

9. Conclusion

9.1 All enquiries confirm the picture of low achievement and wastage of resources. Any attempts to stem the general decline in standards implies a task the magnitude of which is frightening. It is no consolation but should be said that the problems besetting English are not peculiar to that subject. All school syllabuses need revision. All are taught by poorly paid and inadequately trained personnel. The education system has not yet recovered from the severe disruption of several years of political and social upheaval combined with unpredictable but frequent natural disasters. All aspects of ELT in the educational system need to be completely revised not only to remove the effects of the shortcomings just mentioned, but also because English has now a different status and function compared to the pre-liberation period or even the pre-partition period whose purposes are reflected in the syllabuses, text-books and attitudes. The low level of abilities of students in

English is particularly serious at the tertiary level, where a near-native competence is still expected at least in the syllabuses.

9.2 Despite all these difficulties, however, the indications are that the Government of Bangladesh seriously intends, within the limits of its own resources and the resources available from interested agencies, to reform and improve the whole educational system. And recent pronouncements and emphases underline the high priority that is to be given to English in these reforms and improvements. (See Appendix 3) Senior officials are keen that English should have its appropriate place in in-service institutes (both that presently existing in Dacca, and that projected for Rajshahi). They stress the need for improvement of ELT teacher training in the Teacher Training Colleges and for the establishment of ELT teacher training in the PTIs. There is a growing realisation in the Universities of the need to include language training and even some methodology in English MA degree courses (see Appendix 2), and there is an increasing but as yet unfocussed recognition of the need for English for Academic Purposes. Nobody ignores or denies the magnitude of the task that is required if ELT in Bangladesh is to be improved. All are in agreement that the task must be attempted, and soon.

1. Status of Literature

1.1 English literature is the major foreign literature in Bangladesh. Its position today is a direct result of the history of the development of English in India from the beginning of the nineteenth century. As the involvement with English was with the British, so until recently English literature was exclusively the study of the literature of the British.

1.2 In 1835 English became the official language of business in India. The establishment of English rule meant more than the creation of a new political power. It brought with it new ideas from the West which produced a stir in all Indian and Bengali societies.

1.3 The ideas, and the literary forms in which some of them were expressed, exercised a profound influence upon the development of Bengali literature. Much of the regard for English literature today is not for its own value as a 'window on the world', but for its stimulus to creative writing in Bengali.

1.4 The considerable enthusiasm that exists within the English Departments of the four general Universities for English literature is based on mixed motives; many see it as their duty to uphold the tradition of studying English literature; all have a deep respect for the cultural heritage which English literature makes available; and some enthuse about it because it provides their livelihood. Though the approach towards studying it may be outdated, ossified and suspicious of new developments, English literature still has an assured place within the Universities; and, to be a 'man of English', which means in Bangladesh to have read English at University, is to be regarded as an educated and cultured member of society.

1.5 The exclusive attention to British literature has however changed recently, with the availability of one or two staff qualified to teach American literature. There is some likelihood that broader framework for study may be introduced, but there is as yet no study of Commonwealth literature.

2. Literary Education

2.1 Although poems and prose appear in the school syllabuses for classes 7, 8 and 9, their study is hardly literary in character. Students at the School Certificate level are not asked to write about anything they have read. English literature as an extension of English language teaching really starts at the Intermediate level (classes 11 and 12) when the average age of students is 16. In the prevailing classroom conditions where student language competence is totally inadequate to cope with unsimplified prose pieces, it cannot be described as 'Literature' teaching in the normally accepted sense. Rather it is a vehicle for enabling the student to maintain some little contact with English. The typical pattern of class teaching is for a section of the reading passage to be read aloud by the teacher in English, then to be translated into Bengali with accompanying explanation in Bengali. The most that can be hoped for is a literal comprehension of the piece. In reality,

students memorise answers in English to the questions they 'know' will be set in the examinations.

2.2 At the H.S.C. examination taken at the end of Class 12, there are two papers in English one of which contains, amongst other questions, a section on one of the prescribed prose extracts for which a total of 40 marks is allocated from a total of 100. The other paper deals similarly with the poetry selections. Questions asked are of a type which encourage students to memorise answers and deal with the factual content of the writing. An examiner would be asked to award two marks only for a question such as the following: 'Describe how Miss Mebbin bought a week-end cottage. In this connection write a few words about her character'.

2.2.1 The number of candidates who take GCE 'O' and 'A' level in English literature is insignificant: between five and ten at each sitting.

2.3 There is no professional association of teachers of English.

2.4 Only one book 'English Selections for the Young', an anthology of prose and poetry, is prescribed for the HSC examination. It is available at taka 3.50 (approx. 13p) and, published with variations by each of the Textbook Boards, is owned by most students.

2.4.1 As the preface to this book says 'It contains prose and pieces and poems from different periods of English literature which will be of interest to our young boys and girls. A few simple pieces by modern writers have also been included so as to give them some idea of twentieth century English prose and poetry. There are annotations which contain brief biographical notes on the authors, critical summaries of the prose pieces and poems and difficult words and allusions'. There are ten prose selections, three of which are non-literary in character and twenty eight poems. Of the twenty-eight, six are by poets of this century and only one is still alive.

2.4.2 As there is no introduction nor any teacher's guide, it is impossible to tell on what basis the selections were made. There is no indication of grading and, except in the case of a G C Thornley extract on 'Mass Production', no apparent simplification.

2.4.3 It may be deduced that the presuppositions on which this Anthology was originally based included the convictions that students were linguistically competent enough in the language to manage unsimplified texts and that such a selection was a necessary introduction to English civilization and the world of ideas which a knowledge of English could provide.

2.4.4. It has been estimated (by the ELT Task Force) that the present standard of language competence at the class 12 level is four years behind that of the assumed levels within the textbooks. It is clear that the Anthology can no longer be serving the purposes for which it was intended. A quotation from one of the pieces included - an essay by L A G Strong entitled 'Reading for pleasure' - provides suitable comment: 'What has happened is that they have been shoved up against a book before they were ready for it. It is like giving a young child food only suitable for an adult. Result-indigestion, violent stomach-ache, and a rooted dislike of that article of food for evermore'.

2.5 With the exception of students of Engineering and Agriculture, the only provision for English is within the English Departments of the four general Universities and within the Institute of Modern Languages in Dacca. In 1974 800 students out of a total of 32,000 (ie 2.5%) were studying English at BA and MA levels in the Universities. This does not take account of those students reading English for a degree in the affiliated Degree Colleges. At the BA Pass level figures are not available but at the BA Honours level the number within such colleges is about 100. Nor does the percentage take account of those who opt to take English as a subsidiary subject within their degree.

2.5.1 Students who get admitted to read English within a university English Department take a BA Honours at the end of three years and then follow it immediately with a one-year MA course. Students in the Degree Colleges who opt for a two-year BA Pass course in English, may then get admitted to the University to do a two-year MA programme in English. Both groups therefore take four years to emerge with an MA, which is regarded by employers and students as an essential for a job, particularly in teaching which is the profession most English graduates take up.

2.5.2 All English degrees are degrees in English literature for which, at the BA Honours level, there is a uniform structure throughout the four general Universities: eight written examination papers for which a total of 800 marks is allocated. To this is added marks for a viva and for tutorial work to make a grand total of 900. Most papers are taken at the end of the final year, but it is possible to have one paper taken at the end of the first year. Three Universities have recently decided to make students sit their 'final' English language skills examination at the end of the first year.

2.5.3 The English literature syllabuses at the Universities are uncomprisingly traditional. They have been described by a visiting UK specialist as 'entirely appropriate for native English-speakers of Public or Grammar school background in the period C.1910 but seem singularly ill-suited to the needs of any foreign nation in the deplorable condition of Bangladesh in 1975'. The Cambridge Bibliography of English literature forms the framework of study, and the main aim is to provide students with a chronological overview of English literature from 'Beowulf to Virginia Woolf'. Lecture hours each week are devoted to disseminating 'masses of processed information about the historic-cultural background to periods, movements and individual authors. Only about one seventh of teaching time is given over to the kinds of tutorial work which, in theory at least, reveal whether or not the student has understood the prescribed text or even read it. The background becomes the foreground and the study of literature is seen as being exclusively a process of assimilating information. Thus interpretation and evaluation become matters of the assimilation of information, except that here the information is contained in the books of the accepted literary critics who are treated as finally authoritative'.

2.5.4 It is difficult to arrive at an accurate assessment of depth of study. There are no open-access University libraries for students; seminar libraries are in the process of being built up; foreign books are expensive and difficult to obtain; the idea of reading for pleasure is alien; students are hampered by slow reading speeds. They read the minimum that is necessary for them to meet

the requirements of tutorials and examinations. An informal survey of first-year students revealed that they read between nought and two books per week. One Chairman of an English Department contended that most student essays submitted to him and his staff were 'scissors-and-paste' jobs largely copied almost verbatim from the relevant range of historical and critical works. They represented little or no evidence of first-hand experience of the work forming the topic of the essay.

2.6 Since it is a typical pattern for the BA Honours student to proceed immediately to the one-year institutional MA which provides some opportunity for more specialised study, 'graduate' degrees therefore are post MA and are research degrees for which statutory provision is made at Dacca and Rajshahi. In fact, the research capacities of the libraries is such that research degrees in English are rarely undertaken locally. Those members of staff who have research degrees are the few who have been able to secure scholarships for study overseas either for an MA which has involved an element of research or for a PhD. At the present time only two staff members within the four general University English Departments have PhDs.

3. Literary Scene

3.1 As the national language of Bangladesh Bengali is of great importance in the life of the country. On February 21st each year - Language Martyr's Day, when those who died in the language riots of 1952 are remembered - the nation is reminded of the event and political leaders exhort the people to remember that Bengali is their language and heritage, that it must be taught properly and developed in response to the country's needs. Some 90% of the people of Bangladesh have Bengali as their mother tongue.

3.2 The language is taught in schools as a compulsory subject and poetry and prose are introduced from the first classes at primary level. There is a Bengali literature examination at the School Certificate level which has a prescribed text consisting of a collection of prose and poetry writings. Just as English suffers from being poorly taught in desparately adverse educational conditions so also does Bengali; and University staff in all Departments constantly comment on the poor standards of Bengali that the majority of their students possess. Each of the four general Universities has a Department of Bengali and degrees are offered in the language and the literature. Subjects in higher education are increasingly taught through the medium of Bengali, and Bengali would probably be the universal medium were it not for lack of texts in translation. As there is no likelihood in the foreseeable future that up-to-date texts will become available through translation into Bengali, English will continue as a medium of instruction and particularly as a library language alongside Bengali.

3.3 Local writers do not work in English as a general rule. The main focus of writing in Bengali today is through poetry which has an enthusiastic reception from the educated middle classes. Drama is the least developed of the forms, possibly because Bangladesh lacks a national theatre.

3.3.1 There are few works of British literature which have been translated into Bengali. Up until 1971 the medium of education was English or Urdu and so the impetus for translation was lacking. What translations there are have been produced on a piecemeal basis as a reflection of the enthusiasms of the individual academics

who have attempted them. Amongst translated works are Marlowe's 'Dr Faustus', Shakespeare's 'Sonnets', Milton's 'Samson Agonistes', Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' and the poems of A E Housman.

3.3.2 The picture is roughly the same for other foreign literatures: the tragedies of Greek literature are available in translation, some of the works of Dostoievsky and some Arabic poetry.

3.3.3 There is no local publishing of British literature. Foreign texts are either imported or produced as pirated editions.

3.4 Because of import controls and the lack of foreign currency, foreign texts are difficult to come by in the shops. The best collection of British literature is to be found in Dacca University library but it is easily accessible only to staff, not to students. There is no problem in obtaining Bengali texts in the bookshops.